

Manifesto for mountain development

1. THE NEW FRONTIERS OF THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

The world is entering a phase of enormous upheavals. The geography of development is now marked by the arrival on the scene of new lead players – such as China, India and Brazil – which are destined to perform an ever increasingly important role in the global economy. There is much that is positive about this process of broadening of development, particularly in reducing the problems of deprivation and absolute poverty among vast sections of the world's population; but then it leads to new problems of balancing the additional demand for goods with the resources available. From this perspective, the idea of extending the energy-guzzling model of development, of major concentrations of industry, urban sprawl and services – the system that supported the economic growth of developed countries for much of the last century – is unsustainable. And it is all too likely that energy, environmental and food production issues will be of growing importance for development in the future.

Italy, like all other countries, is being asked to give its contribution to face these problems. For some time, Italy has seen its growth and competitiveness in decline. It manages to stay in the Group of Eight forum because of the contribution of certain dynamic components in the production system (the mid-size industrial companies) and the international specialisation in certain sectors of medium technology for which world demand is strongly growing (tourism services, design and manufacturing quality, automation). But it is not yet putting in place those processes of innovation which could help it defend its positioning in the new international competition. Above all, it has not yet embarked on developing within the 'green economy' which, following the decisions taken by the international community (Kyoto and Europe 2020) and also considering the new ethical awareness of consumers, is destined to become one of the major drivers of future development.

2. MODELS OF DEVELOPMENT AND POLITICAL AGENDA

The obligations of Kyoto, the environmental and energy saving issues, can be looked at in different ways. On one side, as a "cost" to be incurred by companies and consumers and, therefore, as a loss of competitiveness; or, on the other, as a strategy of innovation for entering a new and more "sustainable" model of growth and of consumption. Energy efficiency, producing energy from renewable sources, green technologies, sustainable tourism, and so forth, are already now becoming the new frontiers of the economy in various countries. Many Italian companies could *productively* be included in this new model of development, since they can also count on a competitive advantage deriving from this territory's natural hospitality for tourists, from the quality of the rural landscape and the historical cities, from the existence of environmental systems – mountains, hills, seacoasts – of exceptional naturalistic and cultural value. Now is the time for including entrepreneurial and infrastructural development projects in the Italian political agenda in order to transform the territory in a 'green' way. The example of sustainable construction, which is widespread in certain areas of the country, shows that energy saving is compatible with the best quality of dwellings and, at the same time, enhances the economic value of real estate.

3. MOUNTAIN AND RURAL AREAS AS FACTORS FOR A NEW DEVELOPMENT OF ITALY

Over the last 50 years, there has been significant expansion in Italy of the urban and metropolitan areas, and a corresponding progressive desertion of the mountains and less accessible rural areas. This territorial concentration of development has reached limits that are hard to exceed except at economic, environmental and social costs that would be unsustainable for the whole country. The moment has come to reverse this process, making mountain and rural areas the factors in a new development for Italy. However, a strategy of rebalancing development throughout the territory must not be mistaken for traditional ideas of support for areas in difficulty. Quite the opposite, it means looking at mountain and rural areas as exceptional resources for kick-starting national growth based on the most innovative and promising industrial sectors, not least in economic terms. Think, for instance, of energy production from renewable resources (hydroelectric, solar, biomass, wind power, etc.), of the reduction of CO₂ emissions, of local and organic food production, of cultural and naturalistic tourism, of bio-construction, of sustainable transport systems, and of the intensive development of services for people and companies based on new information and communication technologies. Mountains and rural areas can be the ideal space for such production activities to grow, thereby helping Italy to re-launch in the most advanced direction of innovation and sustainable development. This therefore means a change in perspective in looking at the role of mountain and rural areas: no longer fringe areas but central points of a new model of development, from being areas deserted to places for new economic and social openings, from backward conditions that require economic subsidising to factors of modernisation able to produce services for which there is a paying market demand, from settlement development models competing with urban and metropolitan systems, to environmental, energy, social complementariness. Mountain and rural areas can certainly perform “production” functions comparable to those of the large urban areas, usually the most advanced section of metropolitan development and an increasingly central component for modern needs and consumption styles. A “development programme” can take shape for Italy in this part of the territory since it has talented entrepreneurs, promising growth prospects, and growing demand input both from a local level and on a global scale.

4. FOR A GROUP OF SUSTAINABLE AND SAFE COMMUNITIES

The aim of this manifesto is to promote not just a programme of economic development, but also the civil and urban “renaissance” of Italy. Changes to demographic flows and migratory issues are also transforming the “urban” and social form of our territory. It is all too clear to see that, where there is a prevailing depersonalisation due to major and anonymous concentration – apartment blocks, ghettos, etc. – also social tensions are greater. But where the model of a “sustainable and safe community” is the norm, there can be seen (although not without some inevitable social and cultural tensions) the birth of a “new modernity” based on productive citizenship, social cohesion and a greater responsibility about energy and environmental problems.

5. TRANSFORMING INDIVIDUAL CONSUMPTION AND BEHAVIOURS

Global lifestyle and modern business functions, in line with the new value chain, are not in contrast with “decentralised” organisational structures. Small towns equipped with modern, good quality services, mountain tourist villages, widespread hotels, shopping outlets, “taste” routes, sports parks, former factories transformed into cultural centres, cities of innovation... these are all places in which new models of living and consuming are being tried, integrating advanced service industry businesses with residential areas, agriculture with innovative services and technologies applied to tourism, sport, catering, culture and wellness. So there is no intention to hinder migratory flows from cities to the countryside, nor “green” projects of restructuring urban spaces. In these areas there is quality demand together with new communication infrastructures, housing technologies, transport systems and maintenance services both public and private. Services and maintenance-planning of the territory as a tool for mobilising society.

6. DEMOCRACY AND NEW INSTITUTIONS FOR THE GOVERNANCE OF THE TERRITORY

Italy is also dealing with the transformations outlined above by reforming its institutions. Fiscal “federalism” and new levels of “subsidiarity” between the regions and territories are currently firmly on the government’s agenda. Discussions are still underway, not only in relation to administrative matters (regarding the structures of decision-making levels, the extent of autonomy and the contents of the political decision), but above all in relation to the major themes of the public sector’s “productivity” and the balance between public and private sectors.

There is no contradiction between modernity and development of urban functions, and care of the “mountain and rural” territory. In fact, precisely because of the strategic value of this component important to the country, precisely because of the future centrality of the “Sustainable and Safe Community” model, the small municipalities and the other representative bodies are launching their own specific proposal for Italian federalism: transform the current institutions from local distribution agencies (cost centres for the nation state) to project institutions (profit centres), development agencies, able to develop autonomous investment programmes. It is time to change not just the economic and social model, but also the centre of Italian politics: from subjects from factories and the cities to new, emerging subjects in the “green” territories.

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